97-84068-11

Bigelow, Maurice Alpheus

The elements of practical arts for general education

[n.p.]

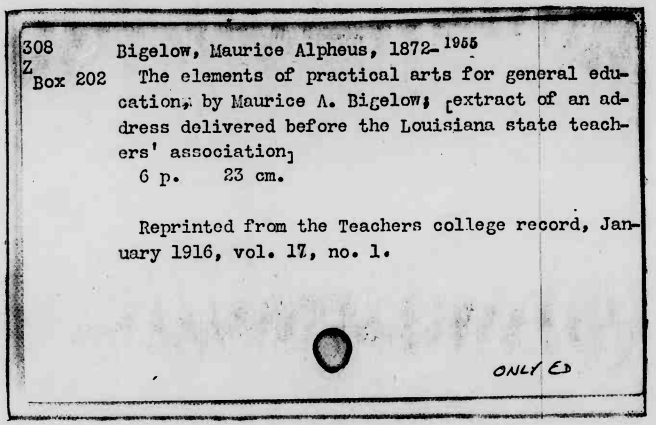
[1916?]

97-84068-11
MASTER NEGATIVE #

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES
PRESERVATION DIVISION

BIBLIOGRAPHIC MICROFORM TARGET

ORIGINAL MATERIAL AS FILMED - EXISTING BIBLIOGRAPHIC RECORD



308
Z
Box 202

Bigelow, Maurice Alpheus, 1872-1955
The elements of practical arts for general education, by Maurice A. Bigelow; [extract of an address delivered before the Louisiana state teachers' association]
6 p. 23 cm.

Reprinted from the Teachers college record, January 1916, vol. 17, no. 1.

ONLY ED

RESTRICTIONS ON USE: *Reproductions may not be made without permission from Columbia University Libraries.*

TECHNICAL MICROFORM DATA

FILM SIZE: 35mm REDUCTION RATIO: 10:1 IMAGE PLACEMENT: IA (IIA) IB IIB

DATE FILMED: 4-29-97 INITIALS: PB

TRACKING # : 23500

FILMED BY PRESERVATION RESOURCES, BETHLEHEM, PA.

Columbia
204
Z
Box 202

THE ELEMENTS OF PRACTICAL ARTS FOR GENERAL EDUCATION*

By MAURICE A. BIGELOW†
Director of School of Practical Arts, Teachers College

Practical arts have appeared in our educational system in response to a widespread demand for special instruction that is directly applicable to the practical and vocational problems of everyday life. It is now generally accepted that there is need of such special or technical training in the education of young people who must be prepared for facing the serious problems of vocational life. In short, practical arts as special or technical education require no defence.

Now, while recognizing the vast significance of practical arts in technical education, we have largely lost sight of the possible contribution of these subjects as a fundamental part of the general education of all young people. This, I believe, is the greatest function of the practical arts in our public educational system, and almost their only reason for existence in elementary education. It is, therefore, the purpose of this paper to point out that the practical arts in their more elementary and general aspects deserve a prominent place in the cultural education of all young people without regard to the need of technical training, which is commonly supposed to be the sole reason for practical arts.

*Extract of an address delivered before the Louisiana State Teachers' Association.

†Reprinted from the TEACHERS COLLEGE RECORD, January, 1916, Vol. XVII, No. 1.

A brief review of the meaning of the term "practical arts" may avoid misunderstanding. Most people who are unfamiliar with the departmental organization of the School of Practical Arts of Teachers College understand practical arts as including only industrial and household arts, both of which have a very practical and vocational relation to daily life. But in Teachers College our organization of practical arts grew out of our very liberal conception of technical education, and so to us "practical arts" have come to include all the educational subjects that are based on a technique or special method of doing things. Hence, in this wide sense, practical arts—which would have been better understood if christened "technical arts"—include fine arts, household arts, industrial arts (both agricultural and mechanical), music, nursing, applied hygiene, and physical education. These may or may not be "practical" or "applied." For example, drawing may be "practical" if applied to house decoration or machine design, but if not applied, it is no more practical (in the usual material sense) than history, literature, or pure science.

I realize that some misunderstanding has arisen from the common use of the word "practical." It seems to me that it is a mistake to understand technical arts as practical or useful only because they commonly have a close relation to the physical or material affairs of everyday life, or because they may be used vocationally as a means of getting a living. I prefer rather to take Huxley's broader view of "practical" and regard knowledge of every kind as useful in proportion as it tends to affect our daily lives. Looking at practical arts from this standpoint, I am forced to regard an understanding of the elements of the technical arts as an essential part of the "practical" education of men and women, and with or without regard to possible physical or vocational use of the technical knowledge.

Practical arts education should be regarded as closely identified with vocational education only when technical efficiency is emphasized. Those who look at the practical arts with the narrowest vision see its values merely in terms of possible vocational application. This, I believe, is an unfortunately narrow outlook. The elements of practical arts may be made

very important as a phase of general education that is not directed towards vocational ends. Perhaps I can make this point clearer by some illustrations: Music and fine arts deserve to be part of general education because they may be of great significance, or "practical" in the larger sense, to many who do not apply them vocationally. Many of the elementary ideas of household arts, such as the economics of food supply, the principles of cookery, the main facts of nutrition, home sanitation, and the principles of house decoration, should be part of the practical education of all boys; but certainly few boys will find their vocations in the field of household arts. Similarly, certain elementary knowledge of industrial arts (including elementary agriculture) should be taught to girls without reference to vocational application. These are illustrations of how the elements of practical arts may be fitted into our daily lives in numerous useful, but non-vocational, ways.

The above suggestions as to the desirability of similar elementary training in the practical arts for both sexes leads me to the problem of differentiation for boys and girls. In these days we hear much discussion of sex-differentiated education, and it usually refers to the field of practical arts. We do not hear any serious educators advocating one kind or selection of literature or history or mathematics for girls and another for boys; but we hear many proclaiming that household arts is the proper study for girls, and that simultaneously the boys should study mechanical or agricultural arts. Some well-known educators have gone so far as to declare that co-education is a mistake in so far as it means similar education for the two sexes; and by "similar education" they mean the old-line education without practical arts.

Now, we must admit that the advanced technical aspects of household, industrial, mechanical, or agricultural arts are not of equal interest to both sexes; and, hence, practical arts education in its specialized forms must be dissimilar. But note that this refers to the advanced technical or special work and not to the elementary study of the leading facts and principles of practical arts. With regard to these, I insist that there should be no differentiation on sex lines, and I feel sure that we have already gone too far in drawing the line between the

elementary practical arts for the two sexes. Let me illustrate: In many schools of the United States we find household arts specified for girls in elementary grades and in the early years of the high school, while parallel work in agriculture or industrial arts is assigned to the boys. The result is that some of the most useful applied science is sex-limited. Elementary lessons in household arts contain important facts and ideas concerning food economics, principles of nutrition, applied chemistry and physics, bacteriology, sanitation, first principles of cookery—all of which should be a part of the practical, but not technical, education of both boys and girls. It is not fair to the boys that such a train of useful scientific applications should be reserved for the girls under a system of sex-limited instruction in household arts. On the other hand, the agricultural or industrial arts assigned to the boys deal, in the elementary instruction, with many facts that should not be monopolized knowledge of the male sex. Industrial arts deal with the world's work and modern women should have cultural, if not technical, knowledge of the great industrial relations and problems. Therefore, I advocate that girls should have elementary shopwork instruction, especially since so much of it applies to the home and at the same time will help women to understand industrial life; and they should have at least one year of elementary agriculture in every school which offers it for the boys.

These illustrations will make clear my meaning when I declare that we have already made some serious mistakes in differentiating certain aspects of elementary practical arts along sex lines. This extreme differentiation seems to have had its origin in the names and definitions given to household and industrial arts. Some committee declared years ago that housework is not an industry and that industrial arts are primarily of interest to males. Having thus set off household arts exclusively for women and industrial arts largely for men, the courses of study in our schools have been developed without regard to the fact that in the elementary facts and ideas of each of these practical arts there is much of value and interest to both sexes.

Now, as the solution of this problem, which I believe is the most important one which now affects practical arts for public

schools, especially in years below the second of high school: Evidently we can not solve it by advising household arts for boys or industrial shopwork for girls. Boys will not elect courses called household arts, or domestic science, or home economics. A few girls will elect, under favorable conditions, agriculture or mechanical arts. The result is sex-differentiated practical arts. It cannot be otherwise under the names "household" and "industrial." I have come to believe that we must offer the elementary practical arts of interest to both sexes under new names, and not apply such names as industrial arts, household arts, or agriculture, until advanced technical differentiation between the two sexes is natural and useful. In my opinion, a very limited amount of such specialized study is needed in elementary schools.

There are two possible arrangements looking towards this end: (1) Teach the elements of practical arts equally to children of both sexes in elementary schools; and call such study "practical arts," not household or industrial arts. (2) Involve the elements of practical arts in the other subjects which are fundamentals for practical arts. This means fine arts and the natural sciences (including nature-study and elementary science).

I prefer the second suggestion for the beginning because it seems to me most natural and economical. However, the teacher must work from the practical arts point of view, and so it little matters whether the desirable studies be presented as elementary practical arts or as applications of elementary sciences and fine arts.

By teaching the elements of practical arts in connection with the fundamental subjects, I mean that beginning with the earliest nature-study and art work the practical bearings should be developed. For example, the art lessons of the elementary schools might be arranged so as to give both boys and girls the essential knowledge of the household arts applications in home furnishings and decoration and costume design. Of course, I do not mean technical training in these lines; but, for that matter, no very important technical training could be taught in elementary schools even if these applications of art were limited to girls in a class in "domestic art." In a similar manner, all the important facts of hygiene, nutrition, food

economics, home sanitation, and even the principles of cookery, can be made interesting to both boys and girls of years equivalent to junior high school, if presented as integral parts of a good course, or courses, in nature-study and introduction to science or elementary science, often misnamed " general science." This also gives numerous opportunities for the mechanical side of industrial arts. In like manner, the elements of agriculture (not the technique) should be taught so as to reach both boys and girls, in nature-study and in applied biology. These are some ways of making elementary practical arts essentially the same for both sexes.

Summarizing the above points, I conclude that sex-differentiated study of elementary practical arts should be avoided (1) because it is highly desirable that education in general should tend to make men and women sympathetically interested in the same problems of life; (2) because it is financially desirable that the values of elementary practical arts be obtained as far as possible without the added expenses inevitably connected with new and special classes; and (3) because the present differentiation between the sexes deprives each of knowledge which is important for the practical purposes of everyday life. For these three reasons, I urge that the elementary facts and principles of practical arts should be taught so as to make both sexes understand (but not be experts) in the same practical problems of life. Co-education will deserve to be a failure if it does not give young men and women similar outlooks on life in all its aspects—practical as well as intellectual. Thus viewing the possibility of cultural, rather than vocational or technical, bearings of the practical arts, I am unable to believe in sex-differentiated elementary studies in these lines.

In closing, let me emphasize the thought already expressed that, while the technical aspects of the practical arts are beyond question the foundations of special or vocational training, the leading facts or ideas, that is, the elements of the practical arts, deserve a prominent place in education for general culture, because they have the larger " practical" bearing on our daily lives.

MSH 23500

END OF
TITLE